

" Between Times- Waiting"

Texts: Acts 1: 6-14

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11 (Series A, 7th Sunday of Easter) Psalm 68:33-10 33-66

John 17:1-11

Prayer:

"Gracious God - bless now the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Breathe your Spirit into us and grant that we may hear and in hearing be led in the way you want us to go. Amen.

There are a lot of people who do not know how to live without excitement, without stimulation. Whether it comes from pleasure - or from crisis - they thrive on activity, on doing things – on solving problems. The time that exists between one crisis or another, between one activity or another is regarded by them as dead time, as time that is lost - time that is unimportant, time that doesn't count.

Today's scripture reading from the Book of Acts tells us how the disciples found themselves in similar situation - how they found themselves having to face a period in which they would simply have to wait for Christ's promise to them to come true.

After the resurrection Jesus visited with his disciples on several occasions. He *taught* them, *he encouraged* them, *he commissioned* them to do a job. Then - on the day of his ascension into heaven when they were anxiously asking him when his kingdom would be established, when the next instalment of the divine plan would take place, he tells them that it is not for them to know the times or periods established by God - but that they should go back to Jerusalem and *wait*,

- wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit,
- wait for the power they would need to witness in Jerusalem, in Judea and all of Samaria, and ultimately in all the world.

For many, *waiting* is a dreadful thing. Just ask any child, even grown ups don't want to wait. Living between times, living between occasions in which all of our minds and hearts and energy are absorbed in affairs of significance can, in fact, be quite wonderful. It can be - for us - a pause that refreshes - a time in which we gain

strength - a time in which we quietly grow and are prepared for that which will come next.

God knows that we too need periods of rest - periods of waiting - periods in which we can be *changed* - *refreshed* - and *renewed*. God provides us with periods of time which are times between - periods in which we can be strengthened and prepared for what is to come next.

The prophet Isaiah 41:31 says it so beautifully, this particular chapter has spoken, strengthened, encouraged me over the years. That:

- those who **wait** for the Lord will **renew** their strength,
- they will mount up on **wings** like eagles,
- they will **run** and not be **weary**, they shall **walk** and not faint.

In this perspective - *waiting is a positive thing*, the time between the making of a promise and its fulfilment is a time which is, or can be, highly beneficial to us. But living in the times between, such as:

- between one job and another,
- between the period when we have lost one dear friend and have yet to find another, these times can be difficult for us if we do not know how to wait in the manner recommended by the word of God.

So how should we live in the times between? Case in point locked down during this Covid-19 pandemic! Three thoughts that I would like to share with you.

First - we need to remember the times in between are meant to be active times - not passive times; times in which we are meant to work at that which is at hand - rather than at that which is yet to come.

When Jesus ascended into heaven before the eyes of his disciples to take his place as Lord at the right hand of God the father an angel visited them and asked them: "Men of Israel - why do you stand looking up toward heaven?"

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you saw him go into heaven."

A Russian psychologist by the name of Pavlov who pioneered in the techniques of conditioning did experiments with dogs. He first rang a bell, and then a second later gave them some meat. After doing this a few times - he rang the bell - but did not give them the meat. Even though the dogs did not get the meat - they salivated - their whole system was geared to receiving meat when a bell rang.

The experiment proved what Pavlov wanted it to prove - that animals - and indeed people could be taught to automatically respond to key signals. Pavlov next wondered how long a period of time he could create between the time of ringing the bell and the time when the dogs would salivate. So he extended the time between ringing the bell and giving the dogs meat. It was quite successful - he could ring the bell and have the dogs go for quite a long period of time before they automatically salivated.

But Pavlov finally ran into a problem. It seems that after a certain period of time the dogs would not salivate as he had hoped - instead they would fall asleep - and they would do this because their attention was so firmly fixed on where the meat was supposed to come from after the bell rang that their entire nervous system would begin to shut down. They concentrated so much on what they were waiting for that they had no energy left to keep themselves awake.

We are not dogs - our attention is not supposed to be focussed so much on Christ's return - or on the next thing that we want to have happen in our lives that we end up forgetting what else is going on, that we end up falling asleep on the job.

In the times between, our eyes are meant to be fixed on the present moment that God has given us and what it is God wants us to do with it and in it. We are called to live now in the way God intended us - rather to live in the future.

While waiting we called to care for the needy, the elderly, the homeless, people with HIV/Aids in Africa and elsewhere, defend the defenceless, vulnerable in our society. We are called to be the hands, feet, mouth, eyes and ears of God.

The disciples heeded the word of the angel who asked them why they were looking up toward heaven -- and they returned to Jerusalem as they had been commanded and waited there for his promise to them to be fulfilled.

And while they **waited** - they devoted themselves to prayer. Which leads to the second important part of learning how to live in the times between: - namely in those times we are called to live as Christ has shown us how to live - in obedience and in connection with God the Father.

There are many ways to prepare for what we believe is coming next, but in the end - for those who are seeking to do God's will and to see God's promises come true in their midst, prayer is of central importance.

As Jesus told the disciples "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you - and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria - and to the ends of the world"

Prayer and devotion to the mind and will of God is of central importance because it is this which prepares us for the gift of the Holy Spirit - it is this which allows us to be open to the power the Spirit bestows.

We all know about gimmicks, quick ways to improve your body or mind: 99 practical solutions to improve your marriage or to create a better business or build a bigger church; but the real solution lies not in these kinds of gimmicks but in having God's Spirit work through us.

It is the Holy Spirit which enabled and guided the ministry of the disciples, and it is the Holy Spirit which enables and guides our own ministry as his followers, our own witness to Christ -- indeed it is the Spirit, and only the Spirit, which allows us to be fruitful with our lives.

As the word of God says

- it is the spirit which gives life... Our task in the times between,
- whether it is a time between what is the work of God,

- or simply a time between one event in our daily lives and another is to make ourselves ready to be used of the Spirit; that Spirit which may come, as it does so often - sooner than we think.

How do we live in the times between? **First** - we need to remember in the times between to focus on what is happening **now**, not on what is going to happen later.

Second - we need to follow the commands of God and keep connected with God through devoted prayer and devotion so that we are strengthened and prepared for the task ahead.

And **Third** - in the times between - we need to **trust** and have **confidence** that what has been promised to us by God will come to pass.

- whether that promise is of a spiritual gift,
- or a promise of comfort and of a new life
- or a promise to bless us and use us in some particular way in his service.

To return to Isaiah's words - those words that say -

- those who **wait** for the Lord will **renew** their strength,
- they will **mount up** on **wings** like eagles,
- they will **run** and not be **weary**,
- they shall **walk** and not **faint**.

Notice in this promise the words - **will** and **shall** - and the total lack of modifiers in front of them.

- It is not - they who wait for Lord *might* renew their strength,
- it is not - *maybe* they will walk and not faint -
- it is - they will *renew* their *strength*
- and - they shall *walk* and not *faint*.

Unconditional promises - attached to a simple statement of condition - the condition which says - They who wait for the Lord - or as it says in the King James version - they who wait upon the Lord. In the **times between**, the **times of waiting**, trust in the Lord to come through,

- remember his resurrection and his ascension into heaven,
- remember what he has done for you in the past and wait for the next act,
- the next promise to come true with a firm hope.

The Living Jesus does care greatly for his followers then and now. For our part, let us return this great comfort by devoting ourselves to prayer as the apostles did while waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them.

Let us follow Prophet Isaiah and Peter's instructions to *cast all our anxiety on God* because *our adversary, the devil*, even in the form of seemingly benign earthly temptation, could easily *devour* our good intentions, carrying us away from what we are called to do in this life.

With some prayer, discipline, and faith, with the presence of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, we, too, will be restored, supported, and strengthened to do the work for which we were created and called. And in the time set by God, we the many will be raised, in unity, to live eternally with the Ascended Jesus. *Blessed be God! To God be the power forever and ever. AMEN!*

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Rejoice, for Christ Is King # 430
- Let Us Break Bread Together # 471
- On Our Way Rejoicing # 537

Our prayers and sincere thanks to All the essential workers during C-19 pandemic.

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